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THE WAY OF THE WORKINGMAN.

BY CY WARMAN.

ONCE there was an artist in an alien land. He liked the place and the people, and so he concluded to build him a shelter and stay among them awhile. The men whom he employed in rearing his new home, though trained to the same tongue as himself, were all strangers to him, from the chief architect to the fair-haired boy who flogged the freckled pony and hauled the hods and hammers for the stone-workers; hauled them for fifty cents a trip—a dollar sometimes,—when any street dray would have performed the same service for a quarter.

Up to the time of signing the contracts, the artist had been a workingman. But that day he went over to the Capitalist column, and labor began to lie in wait for him. So long as he labored and lived in a rented house, where the builders had piped the poisonous sewer-gas in behind the wainscoting, instead of out through the roof, he had been a workingman; but the moment he began to scatter his savings by building himself a home, giving employment to the unemployed, he became the open enemy of the poor, the oppressor of the oppressed, with few rights that labor felt called upon to respect.

All the work was to be done by contract; so the men, of course, worked faithfully, and the new house grew rapidly. Meanwhile, the Capitalist got up with the lark every morning, and painted while the sun was catching and coloring the maples that the frost had nipped the night before. At eight o'clock, when the workmen went by to work, the artist's day was half done. In the afternoon the artist would go over and look into things, and, incidentally, take the temperature of the atmosphere between the contractors and their employees and himself. Each day the air grew grayer and colder. One day, when he caught the carpenters

putting rotten timber into the roof-frame and protested, the head carpenter hinted that he would prefer to take his instructions from the architect. When the artist swore mildly, the carpenter put up his hands, and rolled his eyes skyward in pious horror.

However, on the whole, they were not a bad lot of men; and, at the end of six months, the artist moved into his new house. But he had lost caste. He never got back the respect of the men he had employed.

After a couple of years' work on the canvas, having recovered from his first experience as a Capitalist, the artist decided to enlarge his home. Being in a hurry, he determined to have most of the work done by the day, having in mind the rotten wood used by the contracting carpenters on the previous occasion. Accordingly, he called the architect and instructed him to gather the good people together. Now, when the old gang heard that the lamb had grown a new fleece and was about to lie down again, they all came with sharpened shears for the shearing. They were a fine crew, and, according to the artist's testimony, as loyal a band of Brothers as ever put hands into an employer's pockets. When a question came up between the artist and any one of them, that one could always count on the faithful support of all the others; for, right or wrong, they were with him.

The new carpenter was one of the very best in the place. He was more deeply and earnestly religious, if anything, than the rotten-wood carpenter had been. He gave out the first day that if anybody swore he would leave the job; but nobody swore, and he worked on.

The plasterer was one of the few men who were employed by the piece. The architect had told the Capitalist that fifteen cents a yard was the proper price for plastering; but this fellow, knowing the alien artist for an easy mark, made it eighteen, and the artist, being in a hurry, told him to go ahead.

At the last moment, when all was ready and waiting for him, the plasterer came. The melancholy carpenter met him beneath the artist's window, and they talked together earnestly, for a long time—the carpenter was paid for his time. Presently, the plasterer came into the house, and the carpenter moved as far away as he could go without forfeiting his claim to his pay. The artist went to the plasterer and remonstrated hotly at his tardiness, for he was already a day late, but the hard-finish man

countered. He didn't care for the job, he said, and in any case he would not do it for less than twenty cents a yard.

"But you asked only eighteen," protested the Capitalist, "and now it is too late to look for another man. And see," he went on, "you get paid for three doors and three windows in this room on which you have to do no work at all."

"Twenty cents, or I take my traps away," said the fresco artist, and the alien nodded.

When it was all done and measured, the plasterer claimed only his twenty cents, but there was an extra yard in the next room, which had not been mentioned in the contract. For that yard the man with the white cotton uniform charged one dollar and fifty cents, and he got the money.

Not long after this, a raven flew over from the artist's country, carrying something which enabled the artist to enlarge his holdings and make many improvements. He always employed the same melancholy carpenter, for he was a good carpenter, and, according to his light, a good man; but he didn't use a headlight.

In conversation with the carpenter, the artist always avoided any reference to the plasterer, feeling that the carpenter must allude to the subject sooner or later, as surely as a hunted fox comes back to his starting point, or a murderer returns to the scene of his crime. But when the carpenter related the following incident, the artist exploded. The artist had been complaining about a leak in the summer kitchen which the robbers who had roofed it could not, or would not, repair.

"That reminds me of an awful funny thing that happened last Sunday morning to a friend of mine who is in my trade," said the carpenter, putting his plane down; and he almost smiled as he looked up at the artist. "Father Blank was in his bath, when the whole ceiling gave way and came down, filling the tub and burying the good man under an avalanche of lime, wet paper, and cold rain-water. When they had shovelled him out, the priest called my friend up and he hurried over. Father Blank asked him to go up and try to find what was wrong, before any more damage was done. My friend went above, and saw at a glance that the man who had put on a new roof the day before had left a joint unsoldered. He hunted the tinner up and told him what had happened; and the tinner sent a man over and had the thing fixed.

"Of course," he added, reaching for his plane, "my friend didn't tell Father Blank, for he didn't want to make trouble for the tinner."

"Assuredly not," said the artist, quietly boiling. "Certainly, he could not be expected to do that! To be sure, the tin-roof man is a contractor, like himself—competing with him for work; but he is also a workingman, like yourself, and as such is entitled to your help. Of course, Father Blank had employed your friend as an expert to tell him what was wrong with the roof, but he is a capitalist, and all you people want from him is his capital and his good opinion. His blessing drives no nails with you, for you are of another creed, which makes it easier for you to do him."

The artist was sitting on the edge of a table looking down on the carpenter, who was kneeling in a heap of maple shavings on a hard-wood floor.

"What do you mean?" demanded the meek man with as much severity as he could; "I don't do anybody."

"I mean," said the artist, with his eyes full on the other's upturned face, "that when this poor priest employed your friend as an expert—taking into account, no doubt, the fact that he is a conscientious, Christian man—he had a right to expect from him loyalty to his employer, and not loyalty to the man who, by his criminal carelessness, had imperilled and outraged his reverence. Your friend should have felt himself in honor bound to tell his employer the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, to the end that the man who was responsible for it all might be compelled to pay for his carelessness."

"But no; you must stand together. The tinsmith represents labor, the priest capital; and as between these there can be but one choice. I presume that the very fact of his having a bathtub in his possession, and using it, would work against the priest!"

The carpenter kept his troubled face full upon the artist, and it was now mutely pleading for pity; but the artist was inexorable.

"You are about the best fellow I've had about me here," he went on. "You would not rob me, but you would hold me up while another went through me."

"I can't stand that," said the carpenter; "I want to know what you mean by *that*."

"Listen," said the artist, "for I have suffered to say this for many moons. As often as I have written your name in my check-book have I longed to lay this down to you, and at last my time has come, and as yours goes on I'll say it. Listen! Once there was a hungry pirate of a plasterer who came into this very room, and held me up for three cents a yard for all the wall space and eighteen cents a yard for the doors and windows which he was not to do. When he departed, he was happy and I had been done.

"When he came to do the work, you met him outside, and talked low to him for a long time, glancing over your shoulder for me, but always at the wrong window. When you were through with him, he was dissatisfied, cross, cranky, and I had to add two cents more to each yard of work. For the last yard I paid him a dollar and fifty cents. You are a good, loyal fellow, Jack; but you helped that pirate to pinch me. Now, tell me, do you think that sort of thing square? Is it right or honorable?"

"Well," said the carpenter, with his eyes on the floor, "I had not looked at it in that light before."

"Well, that's the proper light," said the artist, slipping from the table, "and that's the way of the workingman."

"Pick up your plane, Jack, and go on with your work. I must go now, and paint a picture of this business, and I promise you upon the honor of a man—not a workingman, nor a capitalist, but a plain white man—that there shall be no extravagance, no waste of color, but the thing shall be depicted precisely as it occurred."

CY WARMAN.